

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 02976 102320Z

73

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 IO-13

PC-04 AID-20 RSR-01 /127 W

----- 060181

R 102222Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4965

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2976

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR HO ES

SUBJECT: WAR RUMORS SUBSIDE

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 2775

SUMMARY: RUMORS OF WAR WITH SALVADOR HAVE NOW ABOUT DIED OUT. WE DO NOT CONSIDER THAT GOH OR HONDURAN ARMED FORCES EVER TOOK THEM SERIOUSLY. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH RUMORS OF IMPENDING ATTACK BY SALVADOR HAD A LOCAL RUN OF SEVERAL WEEKS, THEY NOW SEEM TO BE OVER. TWO NEWSPAPERS, NOTICIA AND PRENSA, PARTICULARLY DEFLATED THEM BY SENDING A REPORTER TEAM TO TOUR FRONTIER TOWNS. THEIR REPORTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS ARE NOW APPEARING, RIDICULING RUMORS AS UNFOUNDED.

2. RUMORS WERE SO GENERALIZED AND VAGUE THAT IT IS HARD TO CHARACTERIZE THEM OR GUESS THEIR ORIGIN,
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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 02976 102320Z

ALTHOUGH ACAJUTLA MANEUVERS FUELED THEM. IRRESPONSIBLE

AND ANTI-SALVADORAN
CRONISTA GAVE THE STORIES CONSISTENT
PLAY, AND THERE WAS SOME REFERENCE TO THEM IN OTHER
PAPERS. NATIONALIST PARTY FIGURES CERTAINLY PLAYED
ON THEME, INDICATING IT WAS CONGENIAL TO THEIR GENERAL
TACTIC OF EMPHASIZING THE NEGATIVE. HOWEVER, WE HAVE
NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ZUNIGA ORIGINATED THE "WAR RUMORS".

3. SO FAR AS EMBASSY COULD GAUGE, IMPACT OF STORIES WAS
CONSISTENTLY MINIMAL BECAUSE OF GENERAL LACK OF CREDIBILITY
OF CRONISTA AND ALSO BECAUSE GOH REFUSED TO SHOW ANY SIGN
OF REACTING TO THEM. GENERAL LOPEZ DISCOUNTED THEM TO
NEWSMEN IN SEVERAL OFF-THE-RECORD REMARKS IN PRESENCE
OF AMBASSADOR AND COMUSMILGP.

4. PRESENT DEBUNKING EXPEDITION BY PRENSA JOURNALISTS
REPORTS ALMOST COMPLETE ABSENCE OF CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE
WAR ON PART OF HONDURAN FRONTIER POPULATION. IN SPITE
OF THIS, HOWEVER, THERE WAS A CERTAIN UNEASE, AS OUR
PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR DISCOVERED IN TOUR OF AREA ON JULY
20-24. RESIDENTS OF VALLADOLID ON THAT OCCASION
HAD WARNED PCVS TO EVACUATE TOWN. PC DIRECTOR CHECKED
WITH THIRD ZONE COMMANDER (SANTA ROSA DE COPAN) LT. COL.
GARCIA TURCIOS, WHO ASSURED HIM OF LACK OF DANGER.

5. DURING COURSE OF STORIES, HONDURAN MILITARY OFFICERS
ALWAYS INFORMED US THAT THEY WERE FALSE. THESE SOURCES
INCLUDED GEN LOPEZ, GENERAL STAFF OFFICERS, LT. COL.
TURCIOS AND COL. RAMIREZ LANDA, FIRST ZONE COMMANDER
(CHOLUTECA AND GALLE). WHAT DID CONCERN THE HONDURAN
ARMED FORCES WAS THE STILL UNEXPLAINED EPISODE OF THE
PENETRATION INTO HONDURAS OF A PLATOON-STRENGTH GROUP
REPORTEDLY IN HONDURAN UNIFORMS. AT ANY RATE, IN OUR
JUDGMENT, AT NO TIME DID THE HONDURAN ARMED FORCES TAKE
THE BORDER MATTER SERIOUSLY, NOR WAS THERE EVER A CHANCE
OF THEIR TAKING ANY ACTION WHICH ITSELF WOULD HAVE COM-
PLICATED RELATIONS. IN THIS CONNECTION THE ARMED FORCES
HAVE DEVELOPED STRONG IMMUNITIES TO LOCAL PRESS AND RUMOR
CAMPAIGNS, MANY OF WHICH ARE INIMICAL TO PRESENT REGIME.

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 02976 102320Z

6. IN LIGHT OF FOREGOING, WE ARE SOMEWHAT PUZZLED BY
FONMIN BATRES' REFERENCE TO STORIES, WHICH HE OVER-
DESCRIBED AS "WAR HYSTERIA." WE THINK THIS MAY HAVE
REFLECTED HIS SENSITIVITY TO FACT THAT NATIONALIST PARTY
OPPOSITION FIGURES WERE IDENTIFIED WITH CAMPAIGN, AS WELL
AS A SORT OF BROADER FRUSTRATION IN THE FONMIN AT THEIR
INABILITY TO FORESEE ANY PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS ON BORDER
ISSUE. WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE "WAR RUMORS" WERE EVER

TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY BATRES, AND CONSIDER THAT HIS MENTIONING
THEM IN REFERENCE TO HIS APPROACH TO OAS COMMITTEE OF SEVEN
WAS MAINLY ATMOSPHERIC AND TOPICAL. HE HAS IN ANY CASE
ALWAYS DOGGEDLY PURSUED GOAL OF TRYING TO GET BILATERAL
TALKS OFF DEAD CENTER, AND HIS CURRENT INTEREST IN THIS
IS A CONSISTENT CONFIRMATION OF HIS POLICY OVER PAST FEW
MONTHS RATHER THAN A REACTION TO RECENT SCARE STORIES.
SANCHEZ

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